

Questions and Answers

What is the Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) 2005 report?

The SDiG 2005 report is an independent assessment of how Central Government departments have performed against sustainable development targets. The targets measure departments' environmental and social impacts. Meeting targets has economic repercussions – for example, if departments reduce the amount of waste they produce, they will reduce their waste disposal costs.

The targets and the assessment process are outlined in The Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate, known as the Framework.

SDiG 2005 was carried out by the Sustainable Development Commission.

Why is the Sustainable Development Commission involved?

In March this year, the Government strengthened the role of the Sustainable Development Commission to act as an independent watchdog for sustainable development.

Until this year, the performance of central departments against the targets has been assessed in annual reports compiled by the Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).

This year, the responsibility has been transferred to the Sustainable Development Commission, to provide an independent assessment. This is the first report carried out by the Sustainable Development Commission in its new watchdog role.

Why are the targets set?

The targets are set to hold Government accountable to its commitment to sustainable development in the operation of its own departments. Targets are based on existing Government policies and objectives, to ensure that Government follows its own policies and leads by example. Targets are chosen to be challenging and cross-departmental.

As Central Government controls 82,725,000m² of land, and employs c.695,000 people, it has a huge operational footprint through resources used and waste produced. For example, the Government buys £13billion worth of goods and services each year¹.

The sustainable development targets help Government to measure, manage, and improve this operational footprint.

Who sets the targets?

Government sets its own targets. The current targets were set between July 2002 – October 2004 by the Green Ministers Committee (ENV (G)) and the Cabinet Committee on the Environment (ENV).

The Sustainable Development Unit (SDU) in Defra has day to day responsibility for advising on and managing the Framework, which outlines the targets and the assessment process.

The Framework is currently under review: any new targets will be set by the Ministerial Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development in Government (previously ENV (G)). The Sustainable Development Minister for each Government department is represented on this Committee. It is chaired by Elliot Morley, Defra Minister of State for Climate Change and the Environment.

Sustainable Development Ministers are listed below:

Department for Food and Rural Affairs - Elliot Morley (Chair)

Cabinet Office

Jim Murphy MP

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

James Purnell MP

Department for Education & Skills

Maria Eagle MP

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Ben Bradshaw MP

Department of Health

Caroline Flint MP

Department for International Development

Gareth R Thomas MP

Department of Trade & Industry & Export Credit Guarantee Department

Malcolm Wicks MP,

Department for Transport

Karen Buck MP

Department for Work & Pensions

Lord Hunt

Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Ian Pearson MP

HM Treasury

John Healey MP

Home Office

Andy Burnham MP

Department for Constitutional Affairs

Baroness Ashton

Ministry of Defence

Don Touhig MP

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Yvette Cooper MP

Solicitor General

Mike O' Brien MP

Scotland

David Cairns MP

Wales

Nick Ainger MP

Northern Ireland Office

Lord Rooker MP

What do the targets measure?

The targets measure nine key operational areas:

Overarching commitments

(e.g. the establishment of Environmental Management Systems, regular reporting and the preparation of delivery plans.)

Travel (e.g. carbon dioxide emissions from road transport)

Water services (e.g. water consumption)

Waste (waste arisings and recycling rates)

Energy (carbon emissions and energy efficiency)

Procurement (use of environmental clauses in contracts for goods and services)

Estates Management and Construction

(management of contaminated land and heritage sites)

Biodiversity (e.g. condition of Special Sites of Scientific Interest – SSSIs)

How is the data collected?

The Sustainable Development Commission contracted PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to independently manage data collection, data analysis and the development of the report. The Sustainable Development Commission has provided a commentary and analysis based on the PwC report.

PwC obtained their data from a detailed web-based questionnaire (more than 200 questions) completed by all participating central Departments and their Executive Agencies.

Any Department that failed to provide answer(s) to the questions was not included in the analysis to which the question related and is marked as failing to comply in the report.

Is all of Central Government included?

Twenty central Government Departments were asked to participate. The Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) was unable to submit its data before the submission deadline, due to a major restructuring process affecting the whole department. So this year's detailed assessment is based on 19 Departments.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) and the Forestry Commission (FC) shadowed the reporting process this year as a pilot, with a view to full participation next year.

The targets and assessment do not currently apply to the wider public sector, e.g. regional and local authorities, the NHS, and schools.

Is it obligatory to meet the targets?

Yes. Although targets are not legally binding, they are agreed on by Ministers, and departments are expected to meet them.

Who has responsibility for ensuring the Framework targets are met?

The Sustainable Development Ministers, who are responsible for embedding sustainable development in their own Department and related Executive Agencies.

What are the repercussions for not meeting the targets?

The House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee scrutinises Government's progress against its Sustainable Development goals, including the SDiG Framework and targets. If targets are not met, the Environmental Audit Committee has the power to call Ministers to account for their departments' performance, to ensure that public money is being spent appropriately.

How regular are the reports?

SdiG reports are produced annually. This report is for the period April 2004 to March 2005.